

MAGTF Command for CSS Officers

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MAGTF Command for CSS Officers

Written by: Capt Eric M. Beckmann

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Major Ruben Martinez, CG2

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Combat Service Support (CSS) officers do not receive the same opportunity to command a Marine air ground task force (MAGTF) as their ground or aviation counterparts. At The Basic School (TBS), officers are taught that the MAGTF consists of four elements: Command Element (CE), Ground Combat (GCE), Aviation Combat (ACE), and Combat Service Support (CSSE). Excluding the CE, all elements of the MAGTF play an integral role. In an ideal model each element would have respective officers screened for MAGTF command. However, only one MAGTF has been commanded by a CSS officer: Brigadier General Ronald S. Coleman.¹ With today's battlefield being a noncontinuous and the restructuring of the CSSE to better support ground combat operations, the CSS officer should have the same opportunity as his peers to command the MAGTF.

A MAGTF commander chosen from the CSS community provokes controversy within the Marine officer corps. Besides the selection of Brigadier General Coleman to command a Special Purpose MAGTF, no other CSS officer has commanded a MAGTF. In 2006, three colonels were selected for MAGTF command (two infantry and an aviation officer).² Again, no CSS officer was given command of a MAGTF. Doctrinal publications offer mixed

¹ "Active General Officers Biography." *Official Biography for Ronald S. Coleman, USMC Online*. <<http://www.usmc.mil/genbios2.nsf/biographies/E98D4B8F976C234285256C59005C4C06?opendocument>> (2 November 2004).

² U.S. Marine Corps. *MARADMIN 343/05: FY06 Colonel Command Screening Board Results (Corrected Copy)*, 2005 (Washington, D.C.: CMC, 2005), 1-2.

signals about which military occupational specialties (MOS) will be reviewed for MAGTF command. A common thought among many officers is that CSS officers possibly lack fire support knowledge. Finally, CSS officers need to establish tight relationships with their counterparts in order to be accepted as competent MAGTF officers.

Doctrinal Publication

The Operational Terms and Graphics Manual defines command as,

The authority that a commander in the Military Service lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank or assignment. Command includes the authority and responsibility for effectively using available resources and for planning the employment of, organizing, directing, coordinating, and controlling military forces for the accomplishment of assigned missions. It also includes responsibility for health, welfare, morale, and discipline of assigned personnel.³

In the Marine Corps, Commanding Officer billets fall into two categories: specific or any MOS officer. Each category is delineated in the Marine Corps Table of Organization (T/O) designates the MOS selected for that command.

Special priority for any MOS command is given to low density MOSs to ensure promotion. Additionally, this priority is given to ensure proper representation of all MAGTF officers.

³ U.S. Marine Corps. *MCRP 5-2A: Operational Terms and Graphics*, 1997 (Washington, D.C.: CMC, 1997), 1-33.

The Marine Corps command screening program order states, "While this policy restricts some of the larger MOSs from being considered for all available commands, it ensures an equitable opportunity to command for all MOSs."⁴ In addition, the boards may deviate from the 'stringing' plan to ensure a fully qualified officer is slated to a specific command. The selection boards must represent all elements of the MAGTF equally. Nine general officers form the colonel command selection board. Combat arms and aviation generals outnumber CSS generals eight to one.⁵ With four times more combat arms and aviation generals selecting colonels for command, there is a much higher likelihood that combat arms or aviation colonels will be selected for MAGTF command.⁶

Per Marine Corps order, the MAGTF is defined as, "A task organization of Marine forces (division, aircraft wing, and service support groups) under a single command and structured to accomplish a specific mission."⁷ The T/O for the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) states that the MEF commander should have a 9903 MOS or General Officer. The MOS Manual does not define specific MOSs for 9903; therefore, leaving the

⁴ "Active General Officers Biography." *Current Active Duty General Officers, USMC online*. <<http://www.marines.mil/genbios2.nsf/Active+Bios>> (14 December 2005).

⁵ As of 14 December 2006, all MAGTF commands were commanded by infantry or aviation officers.

⁶ Department of the Navy. *MCO 1300.64A: Command Screening Program*, 2004 (Washington, D.C.: CMC, 2004), 5.

⁷ U.S. Marine Corps. *MCRP 5-2A: Operational Terms and Graphics*, 1-97.

possibility that a CSS officer could command an MEF.⁸ An MEF (the largest form of a MAGTF) consists of an MEF headquarters group, an infantry division, a Marine aviation wing (MAW), and a Marine logistics group (MLG). However, according to Marine Corps T/O, a CSS officer can not command a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). The MEU, the smallest conventional MAGTF, has approximately 2,500 personnel and contains all four elements of the MAGTF. Marine Corps T/O designates ground colonels to command a MEU with a 9906 MOS.⁹ Conversely, MEU commanders have come both from the combat arms and aviation communities. Thereby leaving hope of command for the fully qualified CSS officer.

Fire Support

Unless a CSS Officer has done a first tour in a division or as a member of an MEU, he receives little or no exposure to fire support. As second lieutenants at TBS, Marine officers receive eighty hours of fire-support planning instruction.¹⁰ MOS schools do not offer fire-support instruction to junior officers. Additionally, follow on schools such as Tactical Air Control Party or Fire Support Control are not offered to CSS officers.

⁸ Department of the Navy. *MCO P1200.16: MOS Manual*, 2005 (Washington, D.C.: CMC, 2005), 1-138.

⁹ Department of the Navy. *MCO P1200.16: MOS Manual*, 1-139.

¹⁰ "Schedule." *TBS Officer Course*, USMC online. <https://www.tbs.usmc.mil/Pages/Officer_Courses/Schedule/TBS%20TEEP%200405101.htm> (14 December 2005).

Lastly, while attending Expeditionary Warfare School, only a handful of CSS officers will obtain a general knowledge of fire-support planning.

Lacking of fire-support training, CSS officers are often uncomfortable planning, utilizing, and supervising fire support in a MAGTF. An MAGTF commander exercises authority in the planning and operational phases of combat. The MAGTF commander exercises his authority during planning and execution of operations to focus his assets and accomplish the mission. He has three separate, but possibly concurrent, engagements: the deep battle, the close battle, and the rear battle.¹¹ Traditionally, the CSS officer has been responsible for rear-area fires with clearance through the GCE Fire Support Coordination Center (FSCC).¹²

A reason why aviation officers are selected for MAGTF command in part because they understand how to prosecute the deep battle, an area that GCE commander cannot influence. The MAGTF commander focuses his efforts on the deep area battle. To execute this deep battle, the MAGTF commander retains control of all organic assets which can influence the deep battle (including Marine aviation) and exercises priority of tasking aircraft. He also establishes an FSCC to integrate all of the

¹¹ U.S. Marine Corps. *FMFM 2-7: Fire Support in MAGTF Operations*, 1991 (Washington, D.C.: CMC, 1991), 1-6.

¹² U.S. Marine Corps. *FMFM 2-7: Fire Support in MAGTF Operations*, 1-7.

commander's combined-arms assets. All combined arms assets (except aviation) come from the GCE. Because the concentration of fires is on the deep and close fight, the FSCC is staffed with ground combat and aviation personnel (excluding the CSS officer).

Recently, the CSSE was restructured to support the maneuver elements of the MAGTF.¹³ With direct support combat logistic battalions (CLB) providing CSS to a regimental combat team (RCT), the CSS officer can better integrate, plan, and utilize fire support. Because the RCT is located in the main battle area, a habitual relationship with the FSCC is necessary for CLBs working in and around the RCTs area of operation. Additionally, this relationship with fire support allows CSS officers to properly prepare themselves for MAGTF command.

Competence

Marine officers are trained at TBS to learn the responsibilities and duties of a rifle platoon commander. Since rifle platoon commanders are found in the GCE, a great deal of emphasis is placed on this element of the MAGTF. The emphasis upon the GCE produces many second lieutenants who feel let down when they are not assigned a combat-arms MOS. Additionally, a connection can be drawn between the disgruntled second

¹³ U.S. Marine Corps. *MARADMIN 576/05: Logistics Combat Element Reorganization Update and POAM*, 2005 (Washington, D.C.: CMC, 2005), 1.

lieutenant and the truth of the selection process for MAGTF command.¹⁴

Except for aviation officers and lawyers, TBS uses a quality spread for the MOS assignment. Officers who graduate in the top third of their class are just as likely to be selected for CSS as those who graduate at the bottom of their class. This selection process is called the "quality spread" ensuring no MOS gets the entire bottom ranked officers. This selection process ensures that "quality spread" of officers are placed into all MOSs. Although the "quality spread" also ensures some Marines will have a significantly harder time being selected for MAGTF command.

A CSS officer must show great competence within his own MOS, and additionally display his ability to his fellow MAGTF officers. CSS officers are often seen as subject matter experts, but not as MAGTF commanders - as seen by the recent colonel command screening results.¹⁵ Brigadier General Edward G. Usher III, who previously commanded 1st Force Service Support Group, was recently asked when he foresaw a CSS officer as an MAGTF commander. His reply centered on the idea, "that a MAGTF commander must be a competent MAGTF officer understanding the

¹⁴ "Schedule." *TBS Officer Course, USMC online*. <https://www.tbs.usmc.mil/Pages/Officer_Courses/Schedule/TBS%20TEEP%200405101.htm> (14 December 2005).

¹⁵ U.S. Marine Corps. *MARADMIN 343/05: FY06 Colonel Command Screening Board Results (Corrected Copy)*, 2005 (Washington, D.C.: CMC, 2005), 1-2.

wide range of missions and capabilities the organization brings to the battlefield."¹⁶

The direct support CLB offers CSS officers the best opportunity to develop and maintain competence within the MAGTF. Additionally, the CLB allows CSS officers to develop habitual relationships with supported commanders. Habitual relationships will prove useful for recognition on MAGTF screening boards. The CLB has the possibility to galvanize the CSS community ultimately allowing a better chance for a CSS officer to become an MAGTF commander. As these officers continue their careers, future tours in the CLB will showcase their MAGTF abilities. The MLG will finally place CSS officers in direct contact with needed inputs to assist in preparing better MAGTF officers and ultimately MAGTF commanders.

Conclusion

An MAGTF commander chosen from the CSS community should not be a controversial issue within the Marine officer corps. Doctrinal publications need to reflect a rotation of MAGTF command amongst its elements. With the knowledge of fire support and the restructure of the CSSE, the Marine Corps T/O should reflect the CSS officer's ability for MAGTF command. Additionally, CSS officers develop tighter relationships with

¹⁶ Brigadier General Edward G. Usher III, speech to CSS OFEC students, *Expeditionary Warfare School*, USMC, 17 October 2005.

their equivalents. Today, CSS officers should be given MAGTF command. These officers are now properly represented in the MAGTF beside their ground and aviation counterparts.

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